

ZINC DEFICIENCY



BASIC INFORMATION

DESCRIPTION

Inadequate amounts of zinc in body cells. This affects function of the testes, liver and muscles, and affects the structure of bones, teeth, hair and skin. Zinc is a vital part of many enzymes that facilitate chemical reactions necessary for normal body function including immune function and skin healing. It affects all ages, but is most common in children during periods of rapid growth (10 to 18 years).

FREQUENT SIGNS AND SYMPTOMS

2 or more of the following:

- Poor appetite.
- Poor growth.
- Sensations of unpleasant tastes and odors, and decreased senses of taste and smell.
- Decreased sex drive.
- Darkening of skin all over the body.
- Sparse hair growth.
- Deformed nails.

CAUSES

- Excessive consumption of substances that bind zinc and prevent its absorption from the gastrointestinal tract. These include calcium, vitamin D, high fiber diet and phytate enzyme (found in whole-meal bread).
- Surgical removal of any part of the gastrointestinal tract, especially the stomach.
- Parasite infestation in the gastrointestinal tract.
- Excessive milk consumption in preschool children.

RISK INCREASES WITH

- Alcoholism. Alcohol increases the excretion of zinc.
- Use of cortisone drugs, which increase zinc excretion.
- Pregnancy.
- Diabetes mellitus, kidney disease or cirrhosis.
- Burns or major trauma.

PREVENTIVE MEASURES

- Adults should not drink or eat more than the recommended amounts of milk, other dairy products or whole-meal bread. Keep calcium intake at 1500 mg or less daily.
- Don't take large doses of vitamin D supplements.
- Take zinc supplements if you have had gastrointestinal surgery.
- Obtain medical treatment for parasite infections.
- Don't drink more than 1 or 2 alcoholic drinks, if any, a day.

EXPECTED OUTCOMES

Usually curable in 2 months with zinc supplements and removal or treatment of the underlying causes.

POSSIBLE COMPLICATIONS

- Iron-deficiency anemia. Zinc is necessary for iron absorption.
- Poor wound healing.
- Liver and spleen enlargement.
- Excess zinc replacement or overdose may interfere with the body's manufacture of necessary enzymes.



TREATMENT

GENERAL MEASURES

- Diagnostic tests may include laboratory blood studies to determine zinc levels; other tests to determine any underlying disorder.
- Treatment usually consists of correcting the cause and administering zinc supplements.

MEDICATIONS

Zinc supplements. Take with milk or meals to prevent stomach upset.

ACTIVITY

No restrictions.

DIET

Eat foods high in zinc such as red meat. Avoid excessive intake of whole-meal bread.



NOTIFY OUR OFFICE IF

You or your child have symptoms of zinc deficiency.